

Plain newsletters get new wrapping

Old-fashioned newsletters, with their plain typewritten copy and scant illustrations, may appear homely in this age of desktop publishing.

Yet, according to the publisher of "Newsletter Publishing: A Guide to Techniques and Tactics," they are the fastest growing print medium. The unadorned style has long enjoyed the greatest credibility of any information format.

It all sounds very tempting for the budding author or business person who dreams of striking it rich by publishing a high-priced newsletter. This spiral-bound, \$250, 116-page book is for them. It's available from Knowledge Industry Publications Inc., 701 Westchester Ave., White Plains, N.Y. 10604, (800) 248-5474.

The book is actually a compendium of articles by 10 authors prominent in the newsletter field. On one hand, I found that it provides exceptionally valuable and time-sav-



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ing information for the would-be publisher. But on the other hand, it seemed to leave out some surprisingly basic advice.

Here is a sampling of some of the articles included:

■ What succeeds in newsletters. A perfect example is the granddaddy of them all, *The Kiplinger Washington Newsletter*. Still going strong, it is just one example of why, despite more polished alternatives, businessmen and politicians have long turned to the information in a newsletter.

■ How to get started. This provides a frank discussion of what makes a successful newsletter.

How "need-to-know" information will always fail when "want-to-know" information is the kind sought.

■ The principles of good newsletter marketing. The basics of direct mail are covered in depth. In addition, this chapter discusses why a good marketer would succeed over a good journalist. Strategies for promotion touch on advertising, radio and TV, and telemarketing.

■ How to pick a newsletter design. Twenty-five basic design decisions are discussed, including selecting the right paper, designing a logo, determining column formats and selecting a type style. The author is not enthusiastic about the use of desktop publishing for high-priced newsletters.

■ The importance of renewals. An entire chapter looks at the reasons most start-ups fail.

On the down side, I was very surprised that the volume left out

the most basic advice of all: Before you get started, study your competition! Understand the market niche of every newsletter in your field and exactly how each one is priced and promoted. And only proceed if you — and everyone in your field that you speak with — agrees that your proposed newsletter fulfills a perceived need.

■ The bottom line: At \$250, this thin volume is a steep investment. A less expensive education might be obtained by studying your competition or resources at the library. But, if you lack experience and are seeking a quick way to learn about the newsletter business before making your move, this could be the best \$250 you ever spent.

Hillel Segal's column evaluates gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.